

serves nine municipalities in Chester County for police high risk incident response. He is a member of the Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association, International Association of Chiefs of Police, Chester County Chiefs of Police Association and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association.

Additionally, Chief Chambers has been a volunteer firefighter and EMT for over 30 years and is a certified Public Safety Diver. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the Chester County Emergency Medical Services Council and serves as Vice President and co-founder of the Chester County Police and Fire Hero Fund, which was created to raise funds for police officers and emergency workers killed or disabled in the line of duty.

Mr. Speaker, in light of his years of exemplary service to his community and litany of sterling accomplishments too long to record, I ask that my colleagues join me today in recognizing Chief Andrew W. Chambers for his invaluable contributions to the quality of life of the citizens of Tredyffrin Township, Chester County, Pennsylvania and our entire nation.

COMMEMORATING THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE KHOJALY TRAGEDY

HON. DAN BOREN

OF OKLAHOMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, February 17, 2012

Mr. BOREN. Mr. Speaker, as the Co-Chairman of the House Azerbaijan Caucus, I rise today to bring attention to the tragedy that took place in Khojaly, Azerbaijan, a town and townspeople that were destroyed on February 26, 1992.

Sadly, today there is little attention or interest paid to the plight of Khojaly outside of Azerbaijan. However, one of our greatest strengths as elected officials is the opportunity to bring to light truths that are little known and command recognition. As a friend of Azerbaijan, I am proud to remind my colleagues that we must never forget the tragedy that took place at Khojaly.

At the time, the Khojaly tragedy was widely covered by the international media, including the Boston Globe, Washington Post, New York Times, Financial Times, and many other European and Russian news agencies.

Khojaly, a town in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, now under the control of Armenian forces, was the site of the largest killing of ethnic Azerbaijani civilians. With a population of approximately 7,000, Khojaly was one of the largest urban settlements of the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan and was destroyed after the attack. Hundreds were killed or injured.

Twenty years later, the cause of this conflict has not yet been resolved. As the Presidents of the United States, Russia and France underlined in their statement at the Deauville Summit in May 26, 2011, the current status quo is unacceptable.

Azerbaijan has been a strong strategic partner and friend of the United States. The tragedy of Khojaly was a crime against humanity and I urge my colleagues to join me in standing with Azerbaijanis as they commemorate this tragedy.

FURTHER HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN CASTRO'S CUBA: THE CONTINUED ABUSE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, February 17, 2012

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I chaired a joint hearing of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights and the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere to focus on just one aspect—though a deeply troubling one—of the overall abysmal human rights record of the dictatorship in Cuba.

The hearing examined the ongoing violations of the human rights of Cuban political prisoners—from the arrest, prosecution, and persecution of political opponents of the Castro regime to the deplorable conditions of their imprisonment—to the terms under which they are released.

The announcement of the release of some prisoners in late December, in conjunction with the release over the past two years of more than three dozen political prisoners, has been described as a public relations move designed to portray a loosening of Cuba's political repression of opponents. Those of us who have had the privilege of knowing and working with Cuba's human rights champions for decades, and have heard first-hand of the brutality of the Castro government, are not so easily persuaded or deceived.

Cuba has been a totalitarian state with the Cuban Communist Party as the sole legal political party for more than half a century. Upon his seizure of power in Cuba in 1959, Fidel Castro promised a return to constitutional rule and democratic elections with social reforms. However, Castro's control over the military and government structures allowed his regime to crush dissent, marginalize resistance leaders and imprison or execute thousands of opponents. Between 1959 and 1962 alone, it is estimated that the Castro regime executed 3,200 people. Hundreds of thousands of Cubans fled an increasingly radical government. Those who remained in Cuba faced a repressive regime that denied basic human rights.

More than fifty years after Castro's assumption of power in Cuba, the U.S. Department of State human rights report on Cuba describes a government that still denies its citizens the right to change their government; threatens, harasses and beats its opponents through state security forces and government-organized mobs; sentences opponents to harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrarily detains human rights advocates and members of independent organizations, and selectively prosecutes perceived opponents and then denies them a fair trial.

Cuba's political prisoners are held, together with the rest of the prison population, in substandard and unhealthy conditions, where they face physical and sexual abuse. Most prisoners suffer from malnutrition and reside in overcrowded cells without appropriate medical attention. In fact, political prisoners face selective denial of medical care. Cuban prisons fail to segregate those held in pre-trial detention from long-term violent inmates, and minors are often mixed in with adults. Such are the conditions opponents of the Castro regime have

faced over the years—some of them for decades.

Armando Valladares, who unfortunately couldn't join us yesterday, but who will appear at a future hearing, was a Cuban Postal Bank employee who was arrested for refusing to display a sign on his desk that promoted communism. Mr. Valladares was imprisoned in 1960 at age 23, and spent 22 years in prison. Like many freed political prisoners, Mr. Valladares moved to the United States.

In 1988, President Ronald Reagan appointed him to serve as the United States Ambassador to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, a position in which he served for two years. I was with Ambassador Valladares in Geneva when he succeeded in bringing Cuba before the commission for human rights violations and authorizing a U.N. fact-finding trip to Cuba to investigate prison conditions.

I have read Mr. Valladares' memoir—*Against All Hope*—a book that chronicles his experiences and that of others in Cuba's gulags. Mr. Valladares systematically describes the torture, cruelty, and degrading treatment by Cuban prison guards. Yet, like so many other heroic Cuban dissidents, he persisted and overcame.

Our surprise witness yesterday was the brilliant, humanitarian Dr. Oscar Elías Biscet. A medical doctor and courageous human rights advocate, Dr. Biscet was one of more than two dozen dissidents who were arrested and detained by Cuban police in August 1999 for organizing meetings in Havana and Matanzas. He was released after five days but was re-arrested three more times. The second time he was arrested, later in 1999, he spent three years in prison. His third arrest in December 2002 resulted in a beating, but not imprisonment. Upon his fourth arrest in March 2003, he was sentenced to 25 years in prison. Along with more than 50 other dissidents, Dr. Biscet was released in March 2011 with the help of the Catholic Church. He has courageously remained in Cuba, where he continues to advocate for human rights. For his extraordinary bravery and commitment to freedom for the Cuban people, many of us have twice recommended Dr. Biscet for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Other political prisoners have not had the ability to choose where they live following their release. Normando Hernández González, an independent writer and journalist, was arrested in March 2003 along with 74 other dissidents in Camaguey and was sentenced to 25 years in prison. As a result of his serious abuse in prison, Mr. Hernández eventually was diagnosed with several diseases of the digestive system and later tuberculosis. Due to his deteriorating medical condition, Mr. Hernández was released from prison in July 2010 and taken to the Havana Airport, where he was briefly reunited with his wife and daughter before being forced to board an overnight flight to Spain. He later emigrated to Miami, where he currently resides.

I extend the gratitude of the subcommittee to our distinguished witnesses for joining us yesterday. My good friend and colleague Dan Burton, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Europe and Eurasia, testified about U.S. policy toward Cuba. In particular, we are deeply appreciative that Dr. Biscet took the serious risk that he will suffer retaliation for speaking with us publicly. The Castro regime should know